06

01 | Whispers

The door is slightly ajar. A young man wearing a duckbill cap snorts, pushing the door open with a finger. His steps kick up dust, and the sound of his shoes hitting the ground echoes in the empty room.

At the window, a man in a raincoat turns his head when he hears the noise. He pulls back his pointed hood. "Long time no see. You look older now."

"Have you gone blind as you kept an eye on Ever?" the man with a duckbill cap retorts, his voice surprisingly old-sounding compared to his appearance. He hands over a black briefcase. "Here are the goods."

An explosion site's striking scent still lingers, rushing into his nose. The man in the raincoat frowns. He pulls out a clean handkerchief from

01 | Whispers

his pocket and wraps it around his hand to pinch a corner of the briefcase. He gives it a couple of shakes before opening it.

Four slightly yellowed pages unfold before him. They quietly tell a story from 14 years ago.

02 | "Unicorn"

Subject Anomalies Record

Recorder:

Josephine, Gaia Research Center, Unicorn Team, Researcher/Team Leader

Date

Observation No. 5, Day 42

Anomalies

Subject 001 regained vital signs after death.

Details

Subject 001: Female, Evol: Anhaunsen Class

Day 41 of Observation: 2:00 A.M. For reasons unknown (suspected to be a researcher's mishandling of the subject), the subject's energy values **rapidly increased** and peaked at 2:39 A.M. It resulted in a powerful **energy burst** within her body (no casualties or equipment was damaged). **All vital signs**

02 "Unicorn"

disappeared after the explosion.

Day 42 of Observation (Today): 4:00 P.M. Vital sign monitors suddenly restarted and slowly transmitted data again. **Heart rate, breathing, and brain activity resumed**. Not only did Subject 001 appear to be alive again, but **energy values also returned to normal**.

A comprehensive physical examination revealed a newly created, **unidentified substance** in her heart.

Experiment Notes

Last night's incident... was like watching a planet evolve and be reborn via an explosion. The substance in her heart is composed of an unknown element. We've never seen it before. When the data was released, the team applauded and cheered. But I wasn't as excited

02 | "Unicorn"

as I imagined myself to be. My intense curiosity overshadowed the joy of achievement.

If she has a "nonexistent element," then what kind of existence is she?

Outside the observation room, Leon asked what we should call this element before we had the right to name it. Everyone gathered around him, and "aether" became the most popular, irresistible candidate. Using that, the unidentified object in her heart composed of "aether" was dubbed an "Aether Core."

After calming down from the excitement, we began to look at her resurrection. Leon quietly asked me if this could be considered a "resurrection from death."

Everyone knew very well that the best way to

02 "Unicorn"

study her resurrection was to "kill" her again. If she woke up once more, then we could confirm that she's truly a unique miracle of life in this research center.

She's just like a mythical creature long sought after and believed to exist only in our imagination: a "unicorn."

A fantastical, beautiful creature.

A box for collecting votes was placed in the corner of the lab. I passed by it several times, unable to give a vote of approval. I know experimentation is a necessary process. She holds too many secrets that are worth researching and carries an unpredictable amount of energy.

Yet despite my desire for knowledge, I still

02 | "Unicorn"

can't ignore the fact that she's a child.

03 | Observation Log

Observer: Josephine

Entry No. 1

"Unicorn" became the child's name in various reports, replacing the cold designation of "Subject 001" (only Leon insisted on calling her "Little Bomb"). She was like a newborn creature, exploring the world every day using only primitive instincts.

After her resurrection, her cognition and memory of her previous "life" were erased. To reassess her abilities, I gave her picture books and cards with words. She quickly passed my tests with flying colors, performing better than children at her age. She absorbed and understood information faster and more thoroughly.

If she were in school, she could easily be a

03 | Observation Log

fifth-grade student.

Entry No. 2

In terms of the Evol experiment, we could only hypothesize from a numerical perspective.

Before she used Evol of her own accord, no one could be sure how the Resonance Evol would manifest.

Only once did she use Resonance unconsciously. The target and range were unclear. Leon has the Acoustic Transmission Evol. That day, everyone heard him talking on the phone with his girlfriend as if he were a broadcaster.

Entry No. 3

Following the voting results, we began our experiment to kill Unicorn in an observation unit yesterday. We also prepared emergency

03 | Observation Log

measures.

The same situation repeated itself. The energy inside her was stimulated to peak faster than last time, which led to a more intense energy burst. It even spread outside the observation unit. Subsequently, all vital signs disappeared, and she entered a state of "death" as we typically understood it.

The shrill alarm of the life detector went off, and I realized my right hand had been tightly clutching the back of my left hand. My forehead was also covered in sweat. I was worried the child would never wake up again, but in this research center, being attached to a test subject is prohibited.

This morning, under the Aether Core's influence, she opened her eyes again as

03 | Observation Log

expected. Leon breathed a sigh of relief. So did I.

I wanted to apologize to the child. But I knew that for her, who had woken up again, the world was a brand new place. She doesn't remember any of us.

However, what was more intriguing than her blank slate of an emotional state was the Aether Core's energy in her heart.

With the reawakening of her consciousness, it had become stronger.

04 | Post-Catastrophe Journal

Day 49, Post-Chronorift Catastrophe, Sunny

Observations on Unicorn had yet to enter Phase 6 when the Chronorift Catastrophe changed the world.

The Gaia Research Center couldn't escape the destruction. When I was rescued from the ruins, the child was nowhere to be seen. She might have escaped when the observation unit was smashed. The Evol Police who helped in the rescue efforts said they haven't seen the child I described.

I imagined many possibilities, but I was certain she was alive.

Days after the disaster, I finally found her in a shelter.

When I took her hand, I heard her call me "Grandma." I never taught her that term, nor

04 | Post-Catastrophe Journal

had she ever called me that. She didn't recognize me either. The days in the research center had once again disappeared from her memory. Yet the seemingly instinctual trust and closeness she showed made me feel as if those forgotten days were always there, invisibly linking us together.

I asked her if she wanted to come home with me. She smiled and nodded.

In the research center, the moment I pushed her into the observation unit felt like a horrible nightmare... Now, holding her soft hand felt like I grasped a redemption bestowed by fate.

Day 75, Post-Chronorift Catastrophe, Sunny

Our lives have calmed down, yet she still

04 | Post-Catastrophe Journal

forgets things from time to time. Her memory is like a faint signal, intermittent and sometimes wavering.

So, I took on the responsibility of a true guardian and cared for her.

I don't know how to describe my current feelings. I never had children, nor did I ever imagine having relatives. It's always been just me at home. But with her and...

Things have started to change.

05 | Journal Entry 4

Day 134, Post-Chronorift Catastrophe, Sunny

Her condition has improved a lot recently. She's less likely to forget things. Perhaps it's because her condition is stabilizing. But I'm still worried and want to check her and the Aether Core. However, I'm unable to contact the researchers who knew of her existence back then, including Leon.

Strange. Maybe Ever's research center called them, or... I don't know.

Looking back, Ever's investment in Gaia wasn't simple research. Our life form observation project was not just for observation. There must be a bigger scheme.

At this point, the only person who I can turn to is Dr. Noah. In the field of cardiology, he's the leading expert and the only one I can still

05 | Journal Entry 4

trust.

The data after the checkup shows the energy peak in her heart is only half of what it used to be.

...What happened to this child when she faced the Chronorift Catastrophe alone? When I subtly asked her, she just shook her head, showing neither pain nor sadness on her face. Seeing her reaction, I suddenly felt that maybe forgetting isn't such a bad thing for her.

06 | Dust

"Is this it?"

Having gone through all the pages, the man in a raincoat appears slightly unsatisfied.

"Don't be too greedy," the man with a duckbill cap snarled. "This is enough for you to confirm her identity and role."

"You silenced Josephine and retrieved the research material from back then. Good work." The man in a raincoat tosses a vial to the hat-wearing man. Then he tucks the pages into his bag and returns the briefcase with a two-finger push. "It stinks. Be careful walking around with it. Otherwise, sharp-nosed hunters might follow its scent back to you."

"Then you better be careful with your handkerchief. When it's tainted with that, you won't make it out either." After checking that

06 | Dust

the drug is the correct one, the hat-wearing man's lips curl into a smirk, his old voice trembling slightly with excitement. "When are you planning to make your move?"

"Why should we rush? Her powers aren't complete yet. Besides..."

The man in a raincoat pauses, glancing outside the window. "Your Prince Xavier has been glued to her side watching over her, right? I've been curious for a while. Do people still practice feudalism where you're from? Isn't that regression in a sense?"

"Hmph, Xavier can only guard her for so long. He's too busy dealing with his own issues," the hat-wearing man says, eagerly stepping forward. "Don't say I didn't warn you. It's not just Ever who wants her. Strike first to gain an

06 | Dust

advantage."

"The one who strikes first is helping her cultivation." The man in a raincoat ignores him, pulling the hood over his head again. "If you can get rid of Xavier in the process, you'd be doing us a big favor. Isn't internal struggle your specialty? Kill Xavier and let Ever crown you as a prince. Haha—"

Arrogant laughter is abruptly cut off as a thin beam of light cuts his neck. Blood spills out as a wrinkled hand grabs his throat and lifts him.

"I can't kill Xavier, but I can do more than deal with a two-legged, carbon-based monkey like you."

"You... Cough, cough... Kill me, then. But how long can you survive in this era?" The man in a raincoat faintly smiles, his trembling fingers

06 | Dust

pointing at the drug in the hat-wearing man's hand.

Then, a scoff resounds near his ear. He's thrown into a corner.

"Tell your masters that they better get their hands on her fast. Based on my experience, her existence isn't as simple as the observation records suggest." The man lowers his hat and turns to leave. "If you keep stalling, Ever will end up losing more than they bargained for once she develops."

Footsteps fade into the distance. The door is slammed shut, leaving the man who's wearing a raincoat lying in the rubble.

"Acting all high and mighty. Backtrackers my ass. Cough... By seniority, I'm your ancestor."

He staggers to his feet, brushing off the dust

06 | Dust

on him.

Fortunately, the substance mixed in the drug hasn't been discovered yet. According to Ever's plan, if they can control that Backtracker with that drug, then controlling Xavier shouldn't be far off. He will soon beat other "Raincoats" and join the real plan.

Ever Group has always valued talent such as a useful lightblade. They can't let it break so easily. Since Unicorn's power isn't complete yet, it's perfectly fine to let her absorb some power—Xavier's, specifically.

Letting his lightblade serve her and becoming the strongest weapon in her hands is something the Resonance Evol can easily achieve. Xavier will surely give her every bit of himself.

06 | Dust

With these thoughts, the man wearing a raincoat can't help but be moved, pulling out a handkerchief to wipe the corner of his eye.

Love truly is a wonderful thing.